

Minutes  
Finance Committee Meeting  
3:30p, January 27, 2015  
First Floor-North Conference Room, City Hall

Present: Vice Mayor Marc Hunt (Chair), Councilman Gordon Smith,  
Councilwoman Gwen Wisler

Staff: Gary Jackson, , Barbara Whitehorn, Tony McDowell, Frank McGowan,  
Cheryl Heywood

**Approval of 10/28/2014 Minutes**

The committee asked that in regard to the Ice Hockey Surplus item, that the 10/28 minutes reflect that the committee recommended the proceeds of the sale would be taken into the civic center fund, and that the repairs to the inline skate park would be factored into decision making in next year's budget. On the Aston Park Tennis item, the minutes should reflect that Vice Mayor Hunt recommended getting to an annual subsidy of around seventy thousand dollars within three years, and Councilman Smith expressed his desire for a shorter time frame. The edited minutes will be approved at the next meeting.

**Property Tax Billing Update**

Ms. Barbara Whitehorn gave the committee an update on the Buncombe County property tax rate and the County's role in collection assessment, and their budget and alternative models to the City's current agreement with the County. (Attachment #1)

The role of the Buncombe County Tax Department is that they bill and collect property tax for most of the municipalities and taxing entities in the County. They have forty two people in that department and their total budget is 4.5 million dollars. The taxing entities include the school systems, fire districts, and most municipalities in the County, including the City of Asheville.

Ms. Whitehorn said that Municipalities and fire districts pay two percent to the County for this service but will have to check to see if there are any legislative exemptions for schools.

Councilwoman Wisler asked what the Asheville City's collection rate is. Ms. Whitehorn said she does not have the rate for just the City, but will get that information.

Ms. Whitehorn said that if council wants staff to take this on internally, she recommends that we have at least a couple of years of evaluating how the County does their collections, as well as looking at other cities that do their own collections. The only time you could implement this with any hope of not having a huge loss in the first couple of years, is at re-valuation. At this point we are getting the best deal we could get.

Vice Mayor Hunt said that Buncombe County performs over one percent better than the statewide average, and can't with confidence say that the City could implement this and do as well as the County, even though we may save on the operational costs. The question is, can we out-perform Buncombe County and have a really good operation and collect 99.2% county wide.

Vice Mayor Hunt asked if we are paying the County our fair share of their costs based on the total revenue that is collected on our behalf. Ms. Whitehorn said she will research and get that information.

### **Pack Square Park**

Ms. Whitehorn gave some history of Pack Square Park and outlined which areas are owned by the City and which are owned by the County. We had a signed agreement in 2001, and a new agreement was drafted in 2009. Pack Square Conservancy went bankrupt and the 2009 agreement was never adopted by the City and the County. . (Attachment 2).

The direction staff would like from Council is what kind of park does council want Pack Square to be. The three choices are 1.) a basic city/county park with continued repair and maintenance; 2.) a signature park with special events-which is what we do now; or a step further where we present it as 3.) a premiere park that is promoted as a venue. How we fund number three would be a council decision.

With the current model, with a fifty-fifty split, we should be asking the county for \$280,000. If we want to go further and create a venue space, we currently don't have a good idea what the cost of providing venue management would be.

Councilman Smith asked what the costs involved in bringing the electrical under the canopy up to code would be and said we should explore with the County if they want to see the park used as a venue.

Vice Mayor said a lot of the park is planted in turf grass and that park staff limits the number of events that can trample that grass. We have to budget the amount of foot traffic and time between events so the grass can repair itself. Ms. Whitehorn said it is critical to coordinate with the people who are booking the space and maintaining the space to let the grass "rest" in between events.

Vice Mayor Hunt said that from an operational standpoint, the current level of maintenance and programming is what the community expects. The City needs to make that happen and would like to see the County participate as much possible but is not willing to accept the approach that would throw the events out because the County is not contributing half, I would rather keep operating about like we are now, and help the County see what it costs. The Nature Center, Pack Square Park; along with other venues that are part of a bigger mix need to be looked at together. I am not convinced we will solve these one at a time.

Ms. Whitehorn asked if the direction the committee would like to go is to see if we can get the County on board with our current costs as we project them, where the fifty-fifty split would be \$280,000 each and see if we can get them on board with that for this coming budget year.

Councilman Smith said that research needs to be done to see what capital investment would be to make it a venue site and make that a information a dimension of the conversation with the County.

### **Public Comment**

As there was no public comment, the chair adjourned the meeting at 4:05p.m.